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FM AMEMBASSY THE HAGUE  
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 8791  
INFO RUEHZG/NATO EU COLLECTIVE PRIORITY  
RUEHBY/AMEMBASSY CANBERRA PRIORITY 2645  
RUEHBUL/AMEMBASSY KABUL PRIORITY 0263  
RUEKJCS/CJCS WASHDC PRIORITY  
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C O N F I D E N T I A L THE HAGUE 000655

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STATE FOR SCA, EUR/UBI, EUR/RPM

E.O. 12958: DECL: 04/10/2017  
TAGS: [MARR](#) [MOPS](#) [NATO](#) [PINS](#) [PREL](#) [AF](#) [NL](#)  
SUBJECT: NETHERLANDS/AFGHANISTAN/JSF: NEW DEFENSE MINISTER  
SETTLES IN

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Classified By: Ambassador Roland Arnall, reasons 1.4 (b,d)  
[¶](#)1. (C) Summary: In his introductory meeting with Ambassador  
Arnall, new Dutch Defense Minister Eimert van Middelkoop  
stressed the importance of success in Afghanistan. He  
repeated official policy regarding the Dutch two-year  
commitment in Uruzgan province, and anticipated a fierce  
debate this summer within the coalition and with parliament  
regarding a possible extension in some capacity past August  
[¶](#)2008. However, he suggested that completely leaving Uruzgan  
""made little sense"" after investing two years worth of time  
and resources, and that the Dutch could possibly team with  
another NATO ally in Uruzgan or continue its partnership with  
Australia under different terms. Van Middelkoop added that  
any perceived U.S. pressure could backfire in both parliament  
and the Dutch public. He also expressed views on a possible  
Dutch deployment to Africa, and continued Dutch participation  
in the Joint Strike Fighter (JSF) program. Van Middelkoop  
discussed these issues with Ambassador Arnall on April 10.  
End summary.  
Afghanistan: Extension Debate Looming

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2, (C) Van Middelkoop stressed that NATO "must succeed" in Afghanistan. He described his recent visit to Uruzgan with new Foreign and Development Ministers Maxime Verhagen and Bert Koenders as "an investment in ourselves," allowing the Dutch to emphasize the comprehensive, "3D" approach balancing defense, development and diplomacy efforts. He was quick to add, however, that the comprehensive approach was "not uniquely a Dutch one," especially as the United States does some aspects far better than the Netherlands -- the USG deserves compliments as well, he said. Van Middelkoop said cooperation in southern Afghanistan was going "very well," but added that the Dutch need more strategic airlift. He said he raised the possibility of helicopter support with NATO SYG Jaap de Hoop Scheffer, and questioned whether the United States might be able to help in that capacity.

¶3. (C) Van Middelkoop turned discussion to the possibility of extending the Dutch deployment in some role beyond its two-year commitment to August 2008. He acknowledged the GONL will make an extension decision by the end of the summer, and anticipated a fierce debate with parliament. Complicating the issue, he said, were differing points of view within the coalition government. He said "officially," the Dutch are committed until 2008, and that NATO is responsible for replacing the Dutch should they decide to leave. Personally, he argued that the Netherlands is a NATO member and is therefore also responsible for finding an ally to replace it should the GONL decide to leave. Moreover, it did not make sense in his view to invest "so much time, energy and resources" in Uruzgan for two years, and then opt to completely leave Uruzgan.

¶4. (C) If the Dutch did choose to extend, van Middelkoop acknowledged they would not be able to continue their deployment at its current capacity. "We are at our limits," van Middelkoop said, "if we extend, it will be in a smaller role." He acknowledged the possibility of teaming with another ally past 2008, and said the Dutch were actively pursuing this possibility. Another option might be for Australia to take the lead in Uruzgan, he added. That said, he stressed the importance of avoiding the perception publicly that the United States and others were pressuring the Dutch to extend -- this had the potential of backfiring should parliament and the Dutch public believe the United States was pushing the Dutch. Amb. Arnall concurred, and added that the Dutch press is keen to create the perception of USG pressure. He noted that in a recent interview with visiting Assistant Secretary of State Dan Fried, a Dutch reporter asked 22 different ways how the United States was pressuring the Netherlands to extend despite Fried's best attempts to assure him otherwise.

Africa: Next Stop After Afghanistan?

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¶5. (C) Amb. Arnall noted the strong interest by coalition government partner Labor Party (PvdA) to become more involved in Africa, and asked whether this might deter the Dutch from extending in Afghanistan. Van Middelkoop acknowledged Labor's desires to "go to Africa," highlighted by Development Minister Koenders' strong interest in the continent. However, he stressed that such interest has "not yet become a real issue." "We are currently committed to Afghanistan -- that is our concrete responsibility," he said. He noted that the Dutch Ministry of Defense was in the very formative stages of reviewing options in Africa -- none of which should distract from the Dutch involvement in Afghanistan. JSF: The Reason He is Defense Minister

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¶6. (C) On the Joint Strike Fighter (JSF), van Middelkoop repeated the government coalition accord language honoring all previous commitments to JSF contingent upon a third-party, independent review of the business case early next year, while making a procurement decision by 2010. Regarding procurement, he said the Dutch will look at JSF and alternatives, i.e., the EuroFighter, but added that none of them posed "any serious threat" to JSF. He acknowledged that there is some cause for caution, given the fact that the Labor Party opposed participating in the production, sustainment and follow-on phase of the program. However, he pointed to Labor's acceptance of the coalition accord as a

positive sign. "Quite frankly," he said, "the reason I am Defense Minister today is that the Labor Party did not want to be in charge of the Ministry of Defense when the Dutch government finally agreed to buy JSF."

Comment

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17. (C) Van Middelkoop, from the government coalition minority member Christian Union party, appeared relaxed and in good spirits regarding his new position -- "who ever thought that my small Christian party would ever be in the government -- let alone that I would be Defense Minister," he laughed. Yet van Middelkoop clearly knew his portfolio and spoke confidently on Afghanistan. Speaking frankly on the transatlantic relationship, he said "perhaps we have missed some chances on bridging the gap, but look how well we are working together in Afghanistan." To date, he has been publicly reticent, preferring to reiterate official policy. However, if his private comments on Afghanistan are any indication, he will play a key role in determining whether the Dutch will continue their deployment in some capacity past August 2008.

ARNALL